

**Psalm 118:22-24** The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. On this day the LORD has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (41)

## Introduction

“On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it,” (Ps 118:24). Are there any words more fitting than those for today? Today we rejoice in the activity of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in the risen Lord Jesus Christ: the one who was crucified, died, and was buried, the one who descended to the dead, and the one who was raised from it. What appeared to be gone, was the furthest thing from. What sounded like bad news, wasn't. What looked like sure failure became a means for something else. All because a rock was moved, and a tomb was opened. What seemed the end, was the beginning.

Today is a day—according to this story—where everything that was, is (now) not the only thing there is. Today is the day we celebrate an action so divine in substance and impact that someone walking out of a tomb—who had been sealed in—became possible. That's not the trajectory of activity when it comes to tombs. When you're sealed in with a massive stone, you do not come back out. But divine action made the impossible possible; the new was ushered in.<sup>1</sup> On this day the possibility opened. In the end, the beginning.

Today is a day—according to this story—where all the doors of the building are thrown open. Today is the day we celebrate a redefinition of what it means to worship God and to be God's people. What was restricted to wood and stone, to brick and mortar is now set loose into the world in spirit and flesh. The very thing that kept God separate from the people was destroyed. The temple veil was torn in two, and the holy transcended and coupled with the common bypassing the rulers and authorities, seeping into the fringes and margins of society.<sup>2</sup> On this day the temple opened. In the end, the beginning.

Today is a day—according to this story—where the entire sky bursts forth with love and hope and peace. Today is the day we celebrate the cessation of incessant rains<sup>3</sup> and the rising of the sun with healing in its wings.<sup>4</sup> This sun shines down, enlivens and invigorates chilled and tired bodies drained from resisting and enduring separation and silence. The sun breaks through the clouds of chaos bringing comfort and peace to those minds exhausted from trying “...to be a man with/A peace of mind/Lord, I try/I just can't find/My peace of mind”—borrowing lyrics from a talented former student of mine.<sup>5</sup> On this day the sky opened. In the end, the beginning.

Today is a day—according to this story—where the very ground underneath violently shook. Today is the day we celebrate great divine movement of the earth opening again.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34; <https://laurenrelarkin.com/2021/03/21/and-the-possibility-opens/>

<sup>2</sup> John 2:13-22; <https://laurenrelarkin.com/2021/03/07/and-the-temple-opens/>

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 9:8ff; <https://laurenrelarkin.com/2021/02/21/and-the-sky-opens/>

<sup>4</sup> Malachi 4:2

<sup>5</sup> Cameron Seaton “Peace of Mind” *Cry Me A Song* 2020

This time, God and God's self dropped into the pit of Sheol; drawing light to shine among the darkness of the dead.<sup>6</sup> Here God searches and finds and looks upon the face of Korah, and as God's hand extends God declares: *Beloved, not even the exile of death and the pit can separate you from me.* On this day the earth opened. In the end, the beginning.

### Mark 16:1-8

Then very early on the first day of the week [the women] went to the tomb after the rising of the sun. And they were continuously talking to themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" (Mk 16:2-3, *translation mine*<sup>7</sup>)

Mark highlights the humanity of the women, thus showcases the divine action of this story.<sup>8</sup> The beginning of the gospel passage opens with what feels like minutia. At the completion of the Sabbath, being Saturday night,<sup>9</sup> the women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—purchase spices and perfumes to use on Jesus's entombed body. Then, early the next morning, they head out.

Apart from Jesus being buried in haste the previous Friday evening, none of this is worth writing home about. Nothing—so far—is out of the ordinary. In fact, Mark robes the story in so much humanity, he writes about the women worrying as they walk to the tomb. The greatly great stone occupied their conversation as they walked. Our English translation misses the extent this stone bothered the consciences of the women. In Greek, it's an imperfect verb indicating a continuous action. Thus, they didn't just ask themselves once about who will roll away the stone; they literally talked about it the entire time.

And then looking up and beholding/gazing that the stone has been rolled away; for it was exceedingly great. (Mk 16:4)

Then suddenly all conversation comes to a dead halt. The women lift their eyes and behold: the very thing they were worried about is removed. The stone was rolled back. What was a regular scene is now an irregular one enveloped in supernatural activity.<sup>10</sup> Our translation loses the

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 16, Psalm 88; <https://laurenrelarkin.com/2021/02/17/and-the-earth-opens/>

<sup>7</sup> All GNT translations are mine in this portion of the sermon

<sup>8</sup> R.T. France *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002. 675, "The setting for the discovery is remarkably down to earth, with the women coming to fulfil the previously omitted duty of anointing Jesus' body with perfumes, worrying about how they were to get into the tomb, meeting there a young man who tells them that Jesus has risen and gives them a message for the disciples and Peter, and running away frightened from this unexpected encounter. This is not the stuff of a heroic epic, still less of a story of magic and wonder, and yet what underlies it is an event beyond human comprehension: the Jesus they had watched dying and being buried some forty hours earlier is no longer dead but rise, *καθως ειπεν υμιν*. It is in this incongruous combination of the everyday with the incomprehensible that many have found one of the most powerful and compelling aspects of the NT accounts not of Jesus' resurrection...but of how the first disciples discovered that he had risen."

<sup>9</sup> France *Mark* 676, "As sabbath finished at sunset on the Saturday, the phrase *διαγενομενου του σαββατου* probably refers to the Saturday evening, the first time after Jesus' hasty burial when it would be possible to buy perfumes."

<sup>10</sup> France *Mark* 678, "Rather than arranging with Joseph's servants to come back with them, they were now trusting to luck that someone would be around to help. But from the dramatic point of view their anxiety is

emotion here. The women didn't just look and see. As the tomb comes into view, they lift their eyes up from having been talking among themselves, and, as they draw near to the tomb, they see...it...#wut? They *gazed* and *beheld* the scene: the greatly great stone was rolled away. Their hearts raced as they gazed in disbelief while trying to make sense of an impossibility made possible. Everything changes here.<sup>11</sup>

As they step inside the tomb, they do not see the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth, which they expected to see. Rather they encounter one whom they did not expect: a young man clothed in bright light, an angelic being.<sup>12</sup> Thus, onto disbelief there is added great astonishment and fear. Their entire world does not make sense.<sup>13</sup> Then, adding to the topsy turvy situation making itself known, the brightly clothed young man says, "Do not be greatly astonished! You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene the one who was crucified; he was raised, he is not here. Behold the place where they placed him" (Mk 16:6). The tomb is open, there's an angelic being casually seated inside, and Jesus's body is not there with the declaration that he is risen.

And they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and bewilderment was holding the women; and they said nothing to no one; for they were terrified. (Mk 16:8)

For these three women, fleeing and running in fear and trembling is a very human response considering a remarkable and an unbelievable encounter with the impossible being made possible. He whom they saw crucified and dead was raised<sup>14</sup> and gone out.<sup>15</sup> When time and space shift and change, when the narrative takes a surprising turn, when the thing that is going to happen does not happen, fear and trembling is a right response. When something overhauls reality, you are put on a collision course with the possible and reality reshaping and altering; it's terrifying. It's why real love is scary and hard to accept and receive (as Jan brilliantly made note

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important as the foil to their discovery that the problem was already solved...The unexplained removal of the stone thus begins to create a sense of superhuman agency in the narrative."

<sup>11</sup> This is Mark's written intent. The Greek here at the beginning of v.4, *και αναβλεψασαι θεωρουσιν...*, is an attendant circumstance construction of an aorist participle and a present indicative main verb. The attendant circumstance indicates that something brand new is happening, there's new action on the table and the author wants you to take note of it.

<sup>12</sup> France *Mark* 678, "Other features of Mark's description add to the supernatural impression: he is wearing white, and the women are terrified."

<sup>13</sup> France *Mark* 679, "For *εκθαμβεομαι*...conveys a powerful mixture of shock and fear, and this is followed by *τρομος και εκτασις* leading to a precipitate flight from the tomb in 16:8. Such a reaction is more consonant with a meeting with an angel than with an ordinary young man, and his first words to the women convey the same impression..."

<sup>14</sup> France *Mark* 680, "*τον εσταυρωμενον*, however, poignantly describes what the women at present believe to be the truth about Jesus. Having themselves watched him die on the cross, they have now come to attend to that tortured body, and that is what they expected to find in the tomb. That whole tragic scenario is reversed in the simple one-word message, *ηγερθη*, though the clause that follow will spell out more fully what this dramatic verb implies."

<sup>15</sup> France *Mark* 680, "The women, even if they were unaware of Jesus' predictions, could not mistake the meaning of this verb in this context. But the *νεαωισκος* goes on to make it clear that he is talking not merely about survival beyond death but about a physical event: the place where Jesus' body had been laid...is empty. The body has gone, and from the promise made in the following verse it is plain that it has gone not by passive removal but in the form of a living, travelling Jesus. However philosophy and theology may find it possible to come to terms with the event, it is clear that Mark is describing a bodily resurrection leading to continuing life and activity on earth."

of on Thursday). Real, unconditional, nonperformance-based love is terrifying because it undoes everything you think you know to be real, to be true, to be actual. The narrative you've been given by the world and crafted in your head about you and the world is exposed as myth by real, unconditional love. Thus, good news can be as terrifying as bad news because it radically alters and transforms the reality of the one who hears such good news.<sup>16</sup> And so, the women run and are afraid. But, in the end, the beginning.

## Conclusion

As Mark's gospel suddenly ends on a note of fear, we are propelled back to the beginning.<sup>17</sup> As the women run from the tomb afraid and in silence, we follow and find ourselves located back at Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."<sup>18</sup> The end of Good Friday is now the beginning that is Easter. This is the source of our hope that springs eternal. Today we come into encounter with this God who raised Jesus of Nazareth the Christ from the dead. And today our world is turned upside down by the "mystery of divine love...acted out in human history," to quote Rev. Emil. Today, in the end the beginning.

Today is a day—according to our story— where everything that is, is not the only thing there is. Today is the day we dare to embrace this divine event and step into the possible. Today we dare to dream of what could be for us and for all those around us. Today we dare to reject what has always been and believe, *anything is possible with God*. Today, the possibility is opened. In the end, the beginning.

Today is a day—according to our story—where we sit in a similar predicament as did the founders of this humble church. Today we are eager to (re)claim our building, to enter it, to be bodily present with others. Yet, we are asked to reconceive what this building means considering divine activity redefining the temple. Can we open the doors and throw open the windows extending divine love to the fringes and margins, spreading good news in word and deed? Can we remember that we were once homeless and without shelter?<sup>19</sup> Do we really believe that God is not restricted to a building but resides in each of us? Today the temple is opened. In the end, the beginning.

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<sup>16</sup> France *Mark* 682-3, "...in Mark the sense of panic is unrelieved. The words the women have heard were entirely good news, but their immediate response is apparently not to absorb the message of the words but to escape as quickly as possible from the unexpectedly numinous situation in which they have been caught up."

<sup>17</sup> France *Mark* 680-1, "The announcement of Jesus' resurrection is not an end in itself, but the basis of action, which for the women is the delivery of an urgent message, and for the disciples to whom that message is sent a journey to Galilee in preparation for the promised meeting with Jesus...Life, discipleship and the cause of the Kingdom of God must go on."

<sup>18</sup> France *Mark* 672, "...the Mark who began his story on an overt note of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God (1:1) and has reminded his readers quite blatantly from time to time of that faith, is not likely to leave any room for doubt about its reality at the end. By the time Mark wrote his gospel the message of the resurrection and the stories of meeting with the risen Jesus were so widely in circulation and so central to the life of the Christ church that there was in any case nothing to be gained by concealment: what is the point of being coy about what everyone already knows."

<sup>19</sup> Reference to a document about the early history of Nativity by Bruce Jones

Today is a day—according to our story—where the sky is illuminated with love and hope and peace. Today is the day we celebrate the rising of the Son with healing in its wings for bodies drained from enduring a pandemic, witnessing human life being destroyed, social upheaval, confusion, and isolation, for bodies exhausted from trying to find peace where peace doesn't reside. Today the sun shines down, warms and energizes our chilled and tired bodies, rejuvenating hope and bringing forth the sapling of long desired peace. Today the sky is opened. In the end, the beginning.

Today is a day—according to our story—where the very ground underneath our feet shook. Today is the day we celebrate the fracturing of old structures and the exposure of the errors and faults of our human judgment and human made systems and kingdoms as the God of life and liberty reigns victorious over death and captivity. We rejoice in the freedom and liberation that is brought in the divine love for the whole world. In the risen Christ, we hear and feel chains and shackles dropping as all the captives are released from the effects of sin and death into new life. On this day the earth opened. In the end, the beginning.